

NAPLAN — RESULTS

554. Mr P.J. RUNDLE to the Minister for Education:

I refer to the recent NAPLAN results, which found that one-third of WA students are not meeting the new proficiency standards in reading, writing and maths, and, as highlighted by the federal Minister for Education, there was a massive over-representation of Indigenous students, regional students and students from poor families not meeting standards.

- (1) What is the minister doing to assist regional schools to attract and retain principals and teachers where there are gaps in many roles within these schools?
- (2) What strategies does the minister have to lift the proficiency standards in the three identified groups of students who need extra assistance?

Dr A.D. BUTI replied:

- (1)–(2) The NAPLAN results this year are under a new system. We moved from a 10-band to a four-band proficiency standard, which is a much better way of measuring students that allows for better interaction with parents. The bands are “exceeding”, “strong”, “developing” and “needs additional support”. There is good news in the sense that Western Australia has the highest participation rate in the NAPLAN tests, and that our year 9 students had the highest scores in numeracy in Australia. That is the good news. There is also other positive news—for instance, the percentage of Western Australian students in the “exceeding” proficiency level is higher than the Australian percentages for year 9 in numeracy, grammar, punctuation, spelling and reading; and for year 7 in spelling. The percentage of WA students in the “strong” proficiency level is higher than the Australian percentages for all year 7 and 9 assessments; for year 5 in reading, writing and spelling; and for year 3 in writing. They are the positives, but I take the member’s point. There is a lot more to be done—not only in WA, but also across Australia, as Minister Clare stated.

The member also asked about what is being done to retain teachers and principals in regional areas, and what we are doing to look after students who are struggling in NAPLAN. Remember that NAPLAN is just one measurement or tool that we have in the education system. In regard to principals and teachers in remote and country schools, we have the attraction and retention incentive. There are other incentives for particular subjects, but it is a challenge. There is a teacher shortage in Australia and internationally. Minister Clare mentioned today that he met up with international ministers at a conference a few months ago and in most of the western world there is a shortage. A number of measures are in place to try to attract more people to the profession. Professor Scott, the vice-chancellor at Sydney University, released a report commissioned by Minister Clare earlier in the year on how we can try to attract and retain teachers, and improve teacher training.

Regarding what we are doing for students who are struggling, we are doing many things. Firstly, this year we instigated a mandatory phonics check in year 1. We have a quality teaching strategy that focuses on early intervention for students who are struggling. We also this year increased the budget for the education adjustment allocation to \$44.5 million over the forward estimates. It was \$33 million last year and now it is \$44.5 million over the forward estimates. That is there to help students who are struggling. It will help with early intervention and may even allow students to be withdrawn from class to get specialised mentoring in numeracy and literacy. Other measures also came out in the budget—for instance, \$137.6 million has been allocated in the forward estimates for students who have disabilities and additional learning needs, in addition to \$8.5 million for students who need assistance.

They are all measures that are very, very important. The additional \$44.5 million education adjustment allowance will now allow us to specialise in intervention for the bottom 15 per cent of students. Previously, it only allowed 10 per cent coverage and now it is 15 per cent. This is a struggle, but this government, the Cook Labor government, is investing an immense amount of money into trying to ensure that we improve the education and academic outcomes for our students across the board, whether they are in the metro area or in country or remote schools.